

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks on Broadband Infrastructure Development Efforts in Raleigh, North Carolina

January 18, 2024

Hey, everybody. How are you? Hello, Raleigh. What a great crowd.

Please have a—take a seat, if you have one. I once said that an event, and people didn't have chairs. *[Laughter]* And the press looked at me and said, "What the hell is the matter with that guy?"

Anyway, Edward, thank you. Sergeant first class.

I was telling him—my son Beau, who I lost because of what happened in Iraq—anyway, my son Beau, when he made major in Iraq, I was—I was there—I wasn't with him when he made that—when he got promoted. But I was with him later at an event—at an event at his—anyway—in Iraq. *[Laughter]* I didn't want to say where I was, but—*[laughter]*—and I said: "Beau, congratulations. You're now a field grade officer." He looked at me and said: "Dad, I know who runs the United States Army. Sergeants First Class run it." *[Laughter]* And that's a fact.

So, Sarge, thank you very, very much.

Folks—Governor Cooper and all the State officials here today—and by the way, you've got the best Governor in the country. Where are—where—*[applause]*—where is he? Roy, stand up. *[Applause]* No, I mean it.

You know what I love about him most? I mean this from the bottom of my heart: He has absolute, total integrity—integrity. Thanks for the welcome back to North Carolina, Gov. I appreciate it very much.

I also want to mention your Congresswoman Deborah Ross. Where's Deborah? Did she—I just had my picture taken with her. That's probably why she left. *[Laughter]* No, all kidding aside—but anyway—you—oh, she couldn't be here, actually. That's not true. I got it mixed up. And she has—you know, she fights very hard for the people of this district, and she is up in Washington right now.

And, folks, I'm here today to talk about something that doesn't get enough attention, and that's the progress we're making to invest in America—all of America.

You know, there was a—there was a law written back in the thirties that says when the Congress passes a bill that has money in it to be spent to build something in America—whether it's an aircraft carrier or it's a highway or whatever it happens to be—that the President should use American workers and American products.

For the longest, longest time, Democrats and Republican Presidents didn't abide by that very much. But I do, because I want to make sure that we make it in America, build it in America with American products. And that's why we've created 14 million new jobs. Folks—bringing opportunity and hope to people and communities across this country.

Let me give you one example of bringing high-speed internet to every person in America.

Nearly a century ago, Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed the Rural Electrification Act, bringing electricity to every home and farm in America, because it was in cities, but it wasn't in a lot of rural areas. Because electricity had become an essential part of modern life, so he wanted—

[inaudible]—everyone had access to it. He was determined that no American should be left behind, no matter where they lived, whether in a big city or a rural area.

Well, I tell you what, I've made the same determination about our time: affordable high-speed internet. It really is critical. It's just as essential today as electricity was a century ago.

Who remembers, you know, during the pandemic when schools were shut down and the master—the sergeant first class mentioned it—kids weren't able to attend schools so they'd go online. How many of you spent time in McDonald parking lots tapping into their Internet so you could do the homework with your kid?

Look, think of all the workers who need internet to do their jobs when they're working from home. So many are working from home—have to work. Small businesses need internet to reach more customers here at home and literally around the world. And our seniors who need it in connection with their doctors through telemedicine because they can't make it to the doctors in person.

High-speed internet isn't a luxury anymore, it's an absolute necessity. It's an absolute—[applause]. No, it really is. And yet, when I became President, around 24 million Americans didn't have access to affordable high-speed internet. And for millions more, their internet connection was limited or unreliable.

That's why, as soon as I came into office, I took action with what we call the American Rescue Plan. And it included more than \$25 billion to invest in affordable internet, high-speed internet all across America.

A few months later, I signed a piece of legislation, which many people didn't think we could get done: the bipartisan infrastructure law. It's a once-in-a-generation investment to rebuild America's infrastructure—our roads, our bridges, our railroads, our high-speed internet—all of it paid for.

And look, our goal is to connect everyone in America to affordable and reliable high-speed internet by the year 2030—everyone in America—just like Franklin Roosevelt did a generation ago with electricity. I promised to be a President for all America, whether you voted for me or not. These investments help all Americans in red States and blue States as well. And we're not leaving anybody behind.

Look—look around North Carolina—and with the leadership of Governor Cooper—with the partnership of your Governor, we've invested more than \$3 billion to expand high-speed internet in every county across this State—\$3 billion. Fiber-optic cable is being laid in the ground as we speak.

Over the next 3 years, over 300,000 homes and businesses all across North Carolina will be connected with affordable high-speed internet.

And today I'm announcing another major step. We're investing another \$82 million to connect 16,000 additional homes and businesses, bringing high-speed internet all across the State of North Carolina, from top to bottom.

And by the end of the decade, we're going to finish the job, reaching all the remaining homes, schools, libraries, small businesses, health care facilities in North Carolina that don't have access to high-speed internet today.

Let me say that again: universal high-speed internet in all of North Carolina by the end of this decade—by the—[applause].

Folks, you just heard from Sergeant Smith a few minutes ago why it matters. He's retired Army—22 years of service, which we owe him. He and his wife Emma live in Tar Heel, as he mentioned, North Carolina—population—staggering population of 100 people. [Laughter]

They've been using dial-up internet for years, just like everyone else in town. It took Edward far too long to download medical paperwork, as he mentioned—the VA. It was hard for his grandkids, who live nearby, to use the internet to do their homework.

And then, thanks to the American Rescue Plan, which I signed into law, fiber-optic cable was laid and the town got high-speed internet.

And now Edward and Emma and the kids and their grandkids can use the internet quickly and easily, from getting care from the VA to doing their homework. Look, their neighbors include folks who can't attend local church service, as he mentioned. They can stream these services at home every single Sunday.

High-speed internet has been a game changer for their town and so many counties all across America. Look—and we're just getting started.

But it's not enough to just have internet access. It needs to be affordable—affordable.

So here's what my administration did. We work with internet service providers to bring down prices for people struggling with their payments. It's called Affordable Connectivity Program. It's already helped 880,000 households in North Carolina save a total of \$440 million on their internet bills collectively.

That's about one in five families across the State are saving \$30 a month for their internet bills, and some save a lot more. That savings in—matters in homes like the one I grew up in. Another 30, 40 bucks a month was the difference between how many groceries, you pay the gas bill, all other necessities. It matters. It matters.

Plus, the investment we're making in high-speed internet means something else as well: good-paying jobs.

And, folks, just ask the folks at the International Brotherhood of Electric Workers, the IBEW, or the Communication Workers union or the Laborers Union. We're putting thousands of people to work laying fiber-optic cable all across America. And that cable will be made in America, put in by Americans. Even better, a lot of that cable will be made in North Carolina.

Two American companies—two American companies—CommScope and Corning, are investing more than \$550 million to manufacture fiber-optic cable, creating around 650 good-paying jobs in Hickory, North Carolina, the single—[inaudible]. And there are going to be more.

Already, 40 percent of all the fiber cable—optic cable in America is being manufactured in Hickory. And, though, that number is going to continue to grow, and jobs are going to grow. And when jobs grow, everything grows. Everything grows. Everything in the community grows.

All told, during my Presidency, we've invested—and I know that it's going to sound like not much to you all—but \$11 billion in North Carolina—[applause]—\$11 billion—in infrastructure, clean energy, everything from high-speed internet to clean water, new roads and bridges.

For example, we're investing \$1 billion—\$1 billion—in a new rail line connecting Raleigh and Richmond, Virginia. Not only creating a whole hell of a lot of jobs, but it's going to take a lot of vehicles off the road, it's going to help with pollution. And guess what? It's going to cut the time—well, let me give you an idea. Right now the trip takes about 3 hours by train. With the new rail line, it's going to take you 2 hours.

Think of what that will mean for people traveling to work and visiting families. Think what it means in the reduction of highway bills.

And we're also investing \$110 million to replace the Alligator River Bridge. Look, that bridge is a major hurricane evacuation route for the Outer Banks, so it's high time it get replaced, because it's in trouble. The bridge now is far too low for boat traffic, which means cars have to stop and wait, sometimes several times a day, for the bridge to swing open so boats can pass underneath. And because the bridge mechanism is 60 years old, sometimes when it swings open it can't close, which stops cars in traffic for hours and sometimes days.

Now, we're building a new higher bridge that boats can easily pass under. It will be wider and more accessible to more cars to travel across every single day, saving time and saving money.

Folks, what we're doing here in North Carolina is just one piece of a much bigger story. To date, 400—excuse me, 40,000 infrastructure projects have been announced across this Nation. Since I've been to office, we've created 14 million new jobs—440 [440,000; White House correction] new jobs in North Carolina alone, just since I came to office. And that's because of this guy right here. Nearly 800,000 manufacturing jobs nationwide.

And unemployment has been below 4 percent for the longest stretch in American history in the last 50 years. And here in North Carolina, unemployment is even lower. It's 3.5 percent. And the stats coming out today show that seeking unemployment insurance has even gone down. Fewer people are needing help.

That's lower than it was in every single month under the last President. Wages are up. Household wealth is up, not only for middle class Americans; for Latinos, for Black Americans, for minorities. Costs are still too high, but inflation continues to fall. And mortgage rates are falling, and they're going to fall more.

Last week, we learned that America filed 16 million—16 million in America—16 million new applications for businesses—for a new business since I became President. Folks, that's a record. Every single one of those new small businesses is an act of hope—an act of hope. It generates progress.

People are beginning to have—and if you look at the consumer confidence, it's way up. Sixty-four percent—I think it may be 62 percent of Americans think their personal circumstance is good and it's getting better.

Meanwhile, thanks to the "Invest in America" agenda, private companies have invested over \$640 billion—let me say it again—\$640 billion in advanced manufacturing here in America.

And by the way, you know, we invented that little computer chip, which everything from your cell phone to your automobile needs. Guess what? We used to control it. We got down to the point where we were hardly manufacturing any of it.

And so what happened when things went bad? We didn't have access to all those computer chips that were being made in Asia and other parts of the world, so I got on a plane and went to South Korea. And I said, "Why don't you come invest in America?" And one thing led to another, and over \$50 billion, people coming to America, investing and building these computer chip factories.

And guess what? It's just getting started. But guess what? The fact is that these computer factories—they build what they call "fabs." They're about as big as a football field. And they manufacture these chips. You don't need a college degree to work in it. And you know what the average starting salary is? A hundred and sixteen thousand dollars. A hundred and sixteen thousand dollars.

And look, put it all together, America has—this is a fact—the strongest growth rate of any—and the lowest inflation rate of any major economy in the world—in the world.

We have a lot more work to do, but there's no question our plan of investing in America and the American people is working. It's all part of my economic vision: building an economy from the middle out—from the middle class out and the bottom up. That way the poor have a shot, the middle class does well, and the wealthy still do well. Well, they've got to start paying their taxes.

You know, I'm serious. I don't mean paying 60 percent. I mean just paying the top rate of 38 percent.

Look, folks, you know how many billionaires we have in America today? One thousand. You know what their average rate—the tax rate—the Federal tax rate is?

[At this point, the President walked away from the podium.]

Oh, I shouldn't walk away from this—*[laughter]*—the Federal tax rate is? Eight and a half percent.

Raise your hand if you'd trade your tax rate for 8½ percent. *[Laughter]* I'm serious. Think about this. There'd be \$40 billion raised if they just paid 38 percent—if they even paid 25 percent.

Folks, look, we all do well when the middle class does well and we grow. Everybody does well.

You know, I'm so tired I—of trickle-down economics. I grew up in a family where not a lot trickled down to my dad's kitchen table. My dad was a hard-working guy. And we weren't poor, but we lived in a three-bedroom, split-level home with four kids and a grandpop. And you know, we were fine. It was okay. But there wasn't anything leftover. There was nothing leftover.

But now a lot of middle class folks are having enough leftovers, they can do things.

Our approach is a fundamental break from trickle-down economics supercharged by my predecessor. *[Laughter]* My predecessor, everything was trickle-down, but not a lot trickled. *[Laughter]* No, I'm serious. Which tax cuts for the wealthy and big corporations, shipping goods [good-paying jobs; White House correction] overseas.

How many people do you know in this State and other States—there was a factory in town that employed 300, 400 people, and all of a sudden you found that factory shipped overseas? Why was it shipped overseas? Cheaper labor costs. So we were shipping factories overseas and importing the product they made here.

Well, guess what? We're doing the opposite. We're making it here and shipping the product overseas. I'm serious.

And also, that trickle-down shrank public investment in education—infrastructure and education. It hollowed out communities, closing factories, leaving too many behind.

And now my predecessor likes to say America is a failing nation. In my faith——

[The President made the sign of the cross.]

——bless me, Father, for he has sinned. I mean, come on. *[Laughter]* A failing nation?

And by the way, did you hear he wants to see the stock market crash, because he does not want—now. We're doing well. He's acknowledging—by that—we're doing pretty damn well economically, and we're getting better. He wants to see the stock market crash. You know why? He doesn't want to be the next Herbert Hoover.

As I told him, he's already Hoover. [Laughter] He's the only President to be President for 4 years and lose jobs, not gain any jobs. Come on, man. [Laughter]

You know, some of the things he said—well, I don't want to get started. [Laughter] But look, frankly, to put it very politely, he doesn't know what he's talking about.

Meanwhile, the vast majority of Republicans in Congress voted against our infrastructure law. We've got enough to make it work, with 30-something. But the vast majority voted against it. They all voted against all the other bills that I had. I mean, 100 percent voted against.

And guess what? Whether it's Marjorie Taylor Greene or whoever—[inaudible]—out, when these new projects come, they're there. They're welcoming it to their State. They voted against it all. So I told them I'll be there for the groundbreaking with them. [Laughter]

You know, look, what was mentioned as well—look at what—I've fought my whole career—I've been around—I know I don't look it, but I've been around for a little while. [Laughter] But all kidding aside, look, you know, I've spent the bulk of my career as a Senator trying to bring down the cost of prescription drugs.

If you have a prescription from your doc and you take it to a pharmacy here in North Carolina or in Wilmington, Delaware, where I'm from, or wherever, guess what? I can take that same prescription from you and go to Toronto, Canada; London, England; Rome, in Italy—anywhere around the world—and it will be somewhere between 50-percent less and 70-percent less. How does that work? Why?

Why is it, in America, you're paying—were paying \$400 a month for insulin if you have diabetes, and in other places, they're paying 35 bucks? Well, guess what? You're paying 35 bucks now, and it's going to go down even further.

And by the way, at \$35, they're making 350-percent gain. It costs 15—it costs 10 bucks to make it, 12 bucks to package it. So come on, man. It's about time we start to be a little fair to ordinary people.

When it comes to voting against the infrastructure law, it doesn't stop many of our Republicans from calling up and saying, "We need a project in my district." Now, what I haven't done is, I haven't blocked projects in their districts, because they're all Americans. The fact they have—a Senator or a Congressman that doesn't know what they're doing, it doesn't mean they should be denied. [Laughter]

But it's okay. It's okay, because I promised to be a President for all Americans. And I mean that sincerely. It's not hyperbole. I promised to be a President for all Americans. And, like I said before, I told them all I'll see them at the groundbreaking.

Let me close with this. When you see shovels in the ground, cranes in the sky, and people hard at work on these projects, I hope you feel pride in America—pride in America—pride knowing we can get big things done when we work together.

You're all the real heroes. That's not hyperbole. You're the real heroes of this story: American workers, the American people, neighbors and community leaders doing the work to bring our cities into the future.

That's what America does. That's why I've never been—and I mean this—and I've been saying this for a while. And the press has to—the press has to cover me everywhere. I've been saying I'm optimistic. I'm optimistic—I've been—I've been around for a while. I've never been optimistic about America's prospects than I am in the last 3 years. I really mean it.

Because there's nothing—nothing, nothing, nothing—we have to remember who we are. We're the United States of America, and nothing is beyond our capacity when we work together. Nothing, nothing, nothing.

And I'll say one last thing. We're the only major company [country; White House correction] in the world that has come out of every crisis stronger than we went in. And that's what we're doing again today because of you.

Thank you, thank you, thank you. May God bless you all, and may God protect our troops.

Thank you very much. Let's go get them. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:02 p.m. at the Abbotts Creek Community Center. In his remarks, he referred to former President Donald J. Trump; and Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene. He also referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens and brothers James B. and Francis W. Biden.

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